

House Resolution 295

By: Representatives Williams of the 165th, Brooks of the 63rd, Heard of the 114th, Murphy of the 120th, Collins of the 95th, and others

A RESOLUTION

1 Acknowledging Georgia's role in slavery and urging reconciliation; and for other purposes.

2 WHEREAS, Georgia is preparing for the sesquicentennial of the Civil War and will be a
3 centerpiece for related tourism and historians; and

4 WHEREAS, James Edward Oglethorpe, Georgia's founding father, established Georgia as
5 a slave-free colony in 1733; and

6 WHEREAS, Georgia was the only one of Britain's American colonies to attempt to prohibit
7 slavery as a matter of public policy; and

8 WHEREAS, the colony's Trustees, bowing to pressure from pro-slavery interests, convinced
9 England's House of Commons to repeal the prohibition against slavery in Georgia as of
10 January 1, 1751. South Carolina planters and their slaves flooded into Georgia and soon
11 dominated the colony's government; and

12 WHEREAS, between 1750 and 1775, Georgia's enslaved population grew in size from less
13 than 500 to approximately 18,000 people. Beginning in the mid-1760's, Georgia began to
14 import slaves directly from Africa; and

15 WHEREAS, in 1776, our nation's Declaration of Independence proclaimed that "all Men are
16 created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that
17 among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness"; and

18 WHEREAS, Georgia and the other American colonies ignored the standards of liberty and
19 equality and, during the era of the American Revolution, African slaves soon constituted
20 nearly half of Georgia's colonial population. Georgia delegates to the Continental Congress
21 forced Thomas Jefferson to tone down his critique of slavery in his initial draft of the
22 Declaration of Independence in 1776. Likewise, at the Constitutional Convention in

23 Philadelphia in 1787, Georgia delegates joined with South Carolina's to insert clauses
24 protecting slavery into the new federal charter; and

25 WHEREAS, during the course of the infamous Atlantic slave trade, millions of Africans
26 became involuntary immigrants to the New World and slavery in the United States resembled
27 no other form of involuntary servitude in that Africans were captured and sold at auction as
28 chattel; and

29 WHEREAS, Africans were brutalized, humiliated, dehumanized, and stripped of their names
30 and heritage, and families were torn apart and sold separately; and

31 WHEREAS, slavery was sanctioned and perpetuated by the laws of the United States of
32 America and the State of Georgia and ranks as one of the most horrendous violations of our
33 nation's and state's founding ideals; and

34 WHEREAS, the slave population of Georgia increased dramatically during the early decades
35 of the nineteenth century. In 1790, just before the explosion in cotton production, some
36 29,264 slaves resided in this state. By 1800, the slave population in Georgia had more than
37 doubled to 59,699. By 1810, the number of slaves had grown to 105,218; and

38 WHEREAS, when Congress banned the African slave trade in 1808, Georgia's slave
39 population did not decline. Instead, the number of slaves imported from the Chesapeake's
40 stagnant plantation economy as well as the number of children born to Georgia slave mothers
41 continued to outpace the number of slaves who died or were transported from Georgia. In
42 1820, the slave population stood at 149,656; in 1840 the slave population had increased to
43 280,944; and in 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, some 462,198 slaves constituted 44
44 percent of the state's total population. By the end of the antebellum era Georgia had more
45 slaves and slaveholders than any state in the Lower South and was second only to Virginia
46 in the South as a whole; and

47 WHEREAS, in January, 1830, the State of Georgia authorized the purchase of slaves for the
48 purpose of building and maintaining roads, and by October of that year, the state had
49 purchased 207 slaves for \$50,000.00. In January of 1834, this state empowered Thomas King
50 of McIntosh County to take over all of these slaves and use or sell them as he saw fit. They
51 were sold at auction the following month; and

52 WHEREAS, even while slavery was playing a dominant economic and political role in
53 Georgia, most white Georgians did not own slaves. In 1860, less than one-third of Georgia's
54 adult white male population of 132,317 were slaveholders; and

55 WHEREAS, propping up the institution of slavery was a judicial system that denied African
56 Americans the legal rights enjoyed by white Americans. Since the colonial era, children born
57 of slave mothers were deemed chattel slaves, doomed to "follow the condition of the mother"
58 irrespective of the father's status. Georgia law supported slavery by restricting the right of
59 slaveholders to free individual slaves. Slaves were taxed as property by the state. Other
60 statutes made the circulation of abolitionist material a capital offense and outlawed slave
61 literacy and unsupervised assembly. Although the law technically prohibited whites from
62 abusing or killing slaves, it was extremely rare for whites to be prosecuted and convicted for
63 these crimes. The legal prohibition against slave testimony about whites denied slaves the
64 ability to provide evidence of their victimization; and

65 WHEREAS, in spite of his promise that he would not interfere with slavery where it existed,
66 Lincoln ended slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862; and

67 WHEREAS, even after the abolition of slavery by the 13th Amendment to the U. S.
68 Constitution on December 18, 1865, there followed a systematic discrimination toward
69 Americans of African descent that was rooted in racial bias and racial misunderstanding; and

70 WHEREAS, African Americans experienced varying degrees of political, social, and
71 economic discrimination for almost 100 years until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act
72 and the 1965 Voting Rights Act led by heroes such as Georgia's Reverend Martin Luther
73 King, Jr., until all laws were rewritten to assure that every American is treated equally under
74 the law; and

75 WHEREAS, in 2005, the Georgia General Assembly finally removed the last vestiges of the
76 Jim Crow laws that remained on the law books.

77 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
78 this body acknowledges that sanctioning and promoting the institution of slavery by the State
79 of Georgia was wrong and that, as a result, denial of liberty and other grave injustices were
80 inflicted on fellow human beings under the auspices of state law.

81 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House of Representatives expresses its profound
82 regret for Georgia's role in the enslavement of Africans.

83 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the members of this body hereby support the fair and
84 accurate education of Georgia citizens about the inhumanity of slavery in order to foster a
85 respect for the fundamental dignity of human life and the God given rights of all people as
86 called for in the Declaration of Independence.

87 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that slavery and the triumph against it, as well as efforts to
88 end lingering inequality and discrimination, are to be embraced and celebrated as the State
89 of Georgia marks the historic sesquicentennial anniversary of the Civil War; that official
90 promotions and educational material should include Georgia's role in slavery; and that, by
91 doing so, we will recognize that an accurate and unbiased understanding of our common
92 history will make possible a deep and lasting reconciliation of all Georgians.

93 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized
94 and directed to transmit appropriate copies of this resolution to the Governor, the Georgia
95 Department of Economic Development, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the
96 Chancellor of the Board of Regents, and the State School Superintendent.